

Preface

Riparian perspectives of international cooperation in the Eastern Nile Basin

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The following four articles on international cooperation over water resources in the Nile Basin were written by academics from the three countries of the Eastern Nile Basin, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt.

Such a joint assessment by authors from different riparian countries of the same river basin is unique. It has the advantage of giving the reader an “inside” view of the complexities of the Nile question. *Aquatic Sciences* publishes these special feature articles, not because they are academic papers in the traditional sense, but because they are of strong political interest and may stimulate further policy-oriented debate. These papers are not the usual type of contributions to a scholarly journal, e.g., they do not systematically refer to other published work, report on new data collection efforts, or elaborate on theoretical background. The strength of these special feature articles lies elsewhere.

Rather than seeking one “objective” truth, three different perspectives on the same issue are presented. Understanding different stakeholder perspectives is a key step towards cooperation. Only when the different interests, concerns and suggested management options are understood, can the possibility of sustainable cooperation be explored. By presenting different perspectives, these articles are part of an epistemic effort at supporting cooperation in the Nile Basin. According to Keohane (1984:51), “Cooperation requires that the actions of separate individuals or organizations – which are not in pre-existent harmony – be brought into conformity with one another through a process of negotiation, which is often referred

to as ‘policy coordination’.” This process, by its very nature, entails points of newly found consensus as well as of open issues that still need to be dealt with. Both aspects are explored in the following articles. The authors are well qualified to do this, as they have been following the Nile question for decades. At various times they have been consultants to their governments or worked for their governments on water issues. However, the authors do not present governmental positions in the following papers. Their national backgrounds influence their views, yet these are reflected upon and described in their role as independent academics, thus supporting a non-polemical analysis of the situation.

In the first article (Amer et al., 2005), six authors from three different countries and representing four different disciplines, introduce relevant environmental data, national interests, and international initiatives. They identify points of consensus and put forward open questions. They show how much consensus has already been achieved in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), launched in 1999, documenting this historical process and challenging the “Water War” literature. Key lessons learned in regards to the success of the Nile Basin Initiative may well be of great interest to stakeholders of other international river basins. The following three articles then deal with the Nile issues in greater depth, giving more room to the specific perspectives of the three countries. Arsano and Tamrat (2005) analyze Ethiopia’s pressing need to develop its water resources, and some of the national and regional dilemmas hindering implementation. They also assess the unsuccessful past and the more promising present, exploring initiatives to overcome these dilemmas. Moving downstream from Ethiopia, Hamad and El-Battahani (2005) present a wealth of environmental and socio-economic data pertaining to the water resources in

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Sudan. The recent endeavors of the Nile Basin Initiative are portrayed. Sudan's special situation downstream of Ethiopia and the other Nile countries, and upstream of Egypt is carefully highlighted. In the fourth article, Hefny and Amer (2005) examine in detail Egypt's vulnerable situation as the most downstream country of the Nile. They focus on Egypt's water policy of demand-side management, environmental protection and cooperation; a policy grown out of a long history of irrigation. Egypt's concerns and interests regarding the development of the Nile River point in a similar direction as the other articles: that cooperation is the only way forward.

Differences between the three articles lie in the weight given to their respective interests in cooperation, e.g., security, development, irrigation, hydro-electric power production, flood and drought mitigation. The authors also give different priorities to the various ways of enhancing cooperation; e.g., some emphasize a project-by-project approach, others the need to develop a legal and institutional set-up. The articles are complete in themselves if one wants to focus on one country, yet the study of all articles is essential for the reader interested in the Eastern Nile Basin as a whole. This Special Feature is especially relevant as a basis for future studies by national, regional and international researchers, development agencies, and policy makers interested in a participatory approach to the study of international river basins in general, and a

comprehensive assessment of the Eastern Nile Basin in particular.

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